

**Tribhuvan University**

**A Real World Twice Over: The Simulation of the Virtual World  
in Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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**by**

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## Abstract

This research examines the first book of the *Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins. The primary objective of this study is to delve into the world that is the setting for the novel, to establish the level of simulation that has been employed in it, and also to analyze it in terms of the present day world, where the present day world is understood as the postmodern world humans today live in and experience. It aims to lay bare intricacies of the simulated world created by Collins, while dissecting the simulations of the characters within the world. The research critically analyzes the actions and thoughts of the characters to reveal whether they are born merely out of fantasy or out of the structure of the modern human being. The study also aims at elevating the status of the fantasy genre by proving that they are not merely entertainment belonging to children's or young adult literature, but also can contain the deepest truths of life. The study will basically depend on Baudrillard's ideas of simulation and simulacra to establish the kind of simulations that seem to exist in the world created by Collins, and the interesting as well as confounding results that this can give rise to, in the minds of readers. The thesis is based on the idea of the third order of simulacra, wherein Baudrillard mentions that there is no longer any difference between the reality and its representation. The research agrees with this concept that there is little alteration between the reality (or the world outside the arena) and the representation (or the world inside the arena), but the research also gives rise to an interesting concept – that the very ideas of 'reality' and 'simulation', are in a state of flux. As the study examines the setting as a simulation, exciting revelations point out that simulation can actually be much closer to reality than realized, and vice versa. The thesis has pursued these very blurred lines between reality and simulation.

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## **Chapter I: Recognizing and Analyzing Simulation: The Arena in *The Hunger Games***

### **The Novel, The Author and The Issue**

This research focuses on Suzanne Marie Collins's fantasy fiction, *The Hunger Games* (2008), the first part of a trilogy that explores the troubled life of the people in an imaginary kingdom called Panem. The series has been hugely popular, as Rachel Elfassy Bitoun points out, "With 4.3 million copies sold in 2010, its popularity tripled after the first film hit the theatres in 2012, an astounding 27.7 million copies having been sold worldwide" (n.pag.).

At the outset, the novel seems to be the expansion of a dystopian idea, combining science fiction and fantasy to create a totally unimaginable world. As Kate Egan says, "Drawing on Roman history, Greek mythology, war stories, and her long experience as a scriptwriter and storyteller, Collins has created a dystopian world that feels at once foreign and unsettling yet familiar" (4). There are many ways in which the world resembles the one that human beings live in currently, and yet it seems as far away as another planet in the solar system.

However, a close reading suggests that this familiar yet unsettling world is much nearer than we realize – Collins is, in fact, using her setting to resemble the current world that is inhabited and ruled by human beings. Bitoun exemplifies this contrast thoroughly when she talks of Collins's methods:

She creates an imaginary futuristic city, Panem, while at the same time tracing back its historical roots, drawing an interesting parallel with

Romans and their arena games, linking past and future and showing how humanity always had, and still has, this violent impulse, this thirst for destruction. She gets inspiration from 1984, Metropolis and A clockwork's Orange while modernising them at the same time. (n.pag.)

The statement above is an introduction to the strange world that is called Panem, which might seem as if it is set in a dystopian future that can only be imagined, and is yet rooted in history, memories and tales. This juxtaposition of ideas and concepts, of the meandering between past and future, the real and the imaginary, is something that not only recurs through the novel, but also prepares for the ideas of reality and its coups.

Collins's major characters, who spend almost the entire novel battling in a thrilling television show known as the 'Hunger Games', can thus be understood, through the statement above and the explanation beneath, as representations of present-day, past and the future human beings who have been trapped inside the virtual reality that they have created for themselves even in their day-to-day life.

In very simple terms, the trilogy tells a story from the perspective of Katniss Everdeen, a poor girl from one of the poorest regions in the country, District 12. She is one of the tributes chosen to take part in the hunger games through a lottery system, and along with another young boy from the district, Peeta Mellark, she goes on to win the hunger games, and eventually, fight for freedom from the totalitarian rule. Another crucial protagonist is Gale, a rebellious youth belonging to the same district, who displays interesting shades of grey – rebelling against the authority but also becoming overzealous and harming his own people – in this fight for justice. Although the series could be considered as one more Young Adult (YA) fiction recounting a fight of the good against evil, there are actually deeper meanings in the story, and it cleverly draws

parallels between the real life scenario and simulates the outside world so cleverly that it is worth taking a detailed look into the proceedings. Drawing from Bitoun again, *Hunger Games* can best be described in these terms, “A book for teenagers and where teenagers die, so young people can understand the dangers of extremist power and imagine what a world like this would be like. And do everything to prevent it from happening” (n.pag.).

After visiting the background of the text, the first task this project takes up is that of analyzing the lines that Collins has drawn between the world as it exists today, and the world that she has created in her novel. This is better expressed in the words of Vivienne Muller, who says:

The trilogy heavily references the disturbing entertainment of Roman gladiatorial games as well as the immersive nature of computer/video games, the seductive allure of reality television and the distancing effect of mediated images of war and violence to warn of the sinister uses to which these can be harnessed. (qtd. in Brereton, 87)

The description above only stands to reiterate the previous comment that the *Hunger Games* is such a strange mixture of the past and ideas, the enmeshment of modern day and historical ideas, that all of it needs to be carefully examined for underlying subtleties. This thesis not only explores the subtle nuances in which the characters in Panem resemble real life human beings of the present and the past, but also the ways which Collins employs in her novel to support or critique the life lived by present day human beings. Through this, the thesis aims to not only identify the intricacies of contemporary human life as it exists in a technological suspension, but also to study the repercussions of living in a world that is increasingly dependent on the art of seeming to maintain a perfect virtual life.

To support the hypothesis that Collins sets out to present our earth in new ways, this research borrows the ideas of Jean Baudrillard to assert that the novel is actually a simulation of the current world, and Collins is critiquing the current life and times by using the 'Hunger Games' to define the reality shows that litter the television and internet. The linkage and resemblance of the activities of the tributes to the activities of people in the modern world will also be highlighted through Jean Baudrillard's theory of Simulacra and Simulation.

For this, a clearer idea is required of the concepts of 'simulacra' and 'simulation'. In simple terms, simulacra can be identified as a material image which appears as something else without having the "real" object's features or essence. Similarly, simulation is a process to get to the simulacra. Baudrillard mentions that there are three layers of simulation. The first order as falsity is immediately apparent to everyone, because it consists of objects such as maps or paintings that we have been using to substitute for the original. The second order is where the boundary between the real and the representation disappears – this is a form of illusion. In the third order, the representation is actually turned into the real, and it in fact gives rise to the real, which is then commonly understood as the 'representation.' An example of this as Baudrillard provides is 'Disneyland' or 'war' – which seem to be representations, but which actually give birth to the real world outside them, and it is actually the world outside these tiny confines which are actually representations, opposed to what we are used to believing in.

Taking forth from Baudrillard's idea of simulation, if the thesis takes into consideration that the novel or written word is itself a kind of imitation of the original world, then the finding is that the reality created by Collins in her novel is actually the fourth strata of imitation – the first being the world we human beings live in, the second

being the novel as a reflection of the world, the third being the kingdom of Panem created by the author based on reality, and the fourth is the arena within this kingdom, where the games are being played out. It is interesting to note that even within four layers of reality, the arena really stands out as the one which is the closest representation of the present day world, where humans are often being accused of being too digitalized and trying to engage more with the virtual than what is right before their eyes. Take, for example, Farahnez Mohammed's words, who says:

For a young adult series, Suzanne Collin's *The Hunger Games* offers a surprisingly biting criticism of the status quo in the West. Her story is one of a privileged district in society that is altogether indifferent to the suffering going on outside its boundaries. Although Collins disguises it with different names, she has not ventured far from our present reality of global poverty. (n.pag.)

While the idea of discussing 'global poverty' in a YA fiction might sound bizarre and out of context, Collins has masked it remarkable well inside layers of imagination. With bold symbols and images, Collins not only establishes the parallels between the huge wealth divide in her imaginary world, but also makes readers realize just how uncomfortably close this imagination is to the real world.

The second significance of the study is that it attempts to bring the often marginalized and disregarded arena of the "young adult literature" into the forefront. It will attempt to show that even in literature that is many times overlooked as catering only to youths and being of no value to 'serious' literature, there are complex issues to be dealt with, and that they need to be addressed and brought out in the open. Finally, the study also tries to analyze in detail the perception of the author towards this virtual world, the

positive ways in which she has presented it, as well as the ways in which she might seem to be disapproving of it. This will help in judging whether or not the pattern of the portrayal of the virtual world and its consequences has been consistent with the protest over the growing mechanical and virtual identity that humans impose upon themselves and others in the contemporary times.

The growing influence of the computer and internet, along with video games and virtual identities has been widely talked about in recent times – in news reports and fiction, in mass media and inside homes. After Antonin Artaud mentioned “virtual reality” for the first time in 1938 as the illusory nature of characters and objects in the theatre, it has slowly become an accepted and almost expected presence, at least in parts of the world which has adapted itself to the advent of technology. Also, technology has been an integral part of science fiction, and along with hyperreality has become a popular theme in young adult fiction as well. It is interesting to note exactly how these elements have been interwoven into the specific game being played inside the novel, and how closely these have imitated and reflected the modern day world.

### **The Hunger Games**

To understand the significance of the arena in the hunger games, which will be analyzed, there is first a need to understand the background of the hunger games as a sport themselves. As mentioned above, the hunger games is a game created for the entertainment of the ruling class, and also as a reminder for all citizens to be subdued and to obey the regulations of the state, so as to maintain discipline and prevent any form of revolt.

The Hunger Games take place every year with the participants in the kingdom of Panem, in all 12 districts that are ruled by the rich capital city of Capitol. Annually, all the girls and boys from the ages of 12 to 18 are lined up and made to enter their names for the pageant called the hunger games. One boy and one girl from each district (making it altogether 24 children and/or teenagers) represent their district in the arena for the hunger games. All of these participants (termed tributes) are expected to fight to win the games, by eliminating all the other tributes. This is a game which has no place for sympathy or emotions, and is simply based on tributes killing off each other until only one contender is left standing, and is declared the winner.

The winner brings great fortunes to their own selves as well as their (mostly poor and starving districts), and hence it is considered a matter of great pride and fortune to win the competition. It is a competition full of blood and gore, a sadistic and unearthly game that has often been compared to William Golding's classic novel *Lord of the Flies*. As Ellen Pollock explains, "Both stories show the savagery people are capable of, prompting teens to ask themselves what they would do in that situation" (n.pag.). It can be understood as an extreme experiment, bringing together young adults in dire circumstances to observe just how they might behave.

In some cases, the games inside the series have even been compared to the Olympics, often considered the pinnacle of all sports events we have in the world today. Samantha Retrosi even says that "The grandeur of the opening ceremonies of The Hunger Games is designed to mask the cruelty of the competition itself. The Olympic opening ceremonies serve a similar purpose" (n.pag.). The difference here is that this is a game not for sportspersonship, but to kill or get killed. In a subtle way, it also reminds us of the 'Triwizard Tournament' in another YA fiction, the Harry Potter series – where contenders

from three schools need to fight deathly duels to get to the coveted cup. However, even in the midst of gruesome magic, it is made clear that no one will actually die in the tournament, though it is repeatedly insinuated that they might. In stark contrast is this YA fiction (*Hunger Games*), which does not hesitate from taking innocent lives in the pursuit of a game.

The irony even here is the stark inequality and inequity that exists prior to the game and during it. For example, the selection of the tributes in each of the districts can be examined. The districts that are nearest to the Capitol (for example, Districts 1, 2 and 4) are relatively well-off, with better connections to the capital, and with more resources. The residents do not need to worry about food or other necessities, in fact, they wallow in luxury. From a young age, children in these districts are trained to fight, aim and prepare for the games. They are fit, healthy, agile, and are top contenders for every single sphere in the games. In fact, they are known as ‘career tributes’, because their entire mission in life is to take up a spot at the annual games, they view it as a prestigious profession. They also take it as a privilege and honor to represent their district in the Hunger Games, and emerge as the ultimate victors. Mel Williams describes career tributes as “boys and girls who come from wealthier districts than Katniss’s, where they have been trained and fed especially to compete in the Hunger Games and are ruthless killing machines in the arena” (40). It has also been mentioned several times in the novel that this privileged class is very likely to come together and build forces to finish off tributes from the weaker districts, before turning on each other. This gathering of evil forces seems quite disturbing, enough to remind us of wealthier and powerful individuals or even nations coming together to form a monopolizing group. This is one way that the novel, and its characters, are an astonishingly accurate simulation of the present day world.

In light of the most recent global politics, we might even go as far as to say that after Donald Trump has taken over as the President of the United States, his policies and actions have reminded us of the totalitarian regime of Capitol in the kingdom of Panem. This premise is based on an opinion piece by Gabrielle Bluestone, who writes, “It is, as a co-worker pointed out, basically the plot of *The Hunger Games*, a children’s book/movie franchise about an oppressive, totalitarian regime that makes children fight to the death” (n.pag.). Here, ‘it’ refers to the victory tour that President Trump has been planning for himself after his win, and it coincides eerily with the grandiose ways of President Snow, the leader of Panem, who runs an authoritarian-totalitarian dictatorship in the fictional world. This is almost like a prophesy coming true for the United States of America, which has long established itself as the most powerful country in the world, just as the Capitol in Panem has done. Indeed, Constance Grady considers this dystopia to be our reality in these lines: “That’s why it’s our most relevant dystopia: because the dark mirror it holds up to our face isn’t distorting our reflection much at all” (n.pag.). While Collins could not have known of how her writing would come to be so prophetic for the future, the unbridled satire and sarcasm she has for current rulers is well reflected in her novel back then.

Now that a relationship has been established between fiction and reality, it is time to unravel the final nuances of the rules to choose tributes. As discussed, tributes from the ages of 12 to 18 are chosen uniformly from all the districts. Outwardly, this seems like an egalitarian rule. But the truth is that the tributes from the poorer districts always suffer – because they are often so poor that they take a grant, called the ‘tesserae’, in the form of grains and oil, after which they have to allow their names to be added one more time to the lottery, which is known as the time of the reaping. This means that a child from a

poorer region, who has had to take several loans, will have their name in the lottery twice, thrice, or even multiple times. The probability of their names being called out as tributes increases a hundred fold. For example, by the time Katniss turns 16, her name has already been entered for the lottery 20 times, because she often needs to sign up for more food items to help fend for her family.

On the other hand, the children from the better-off districts have no such qualms. Indeed, the children from the capital city of Capitol do not need to compete or put in their names at all. They can just sit back and relax and watch the gruesome show as something detached and distant – as something that can only affect them virtually, as they cheer on for their favorite contenders, and send them ‘gifts’ by being their ‘sponsors’, once again proving how very magnanimous they are. This, too, can be likened to the group of wealthy nations or people in the world who come together to gaze at the misfortunes of the less prosperous nations, and make a great show of their contributions to uplift a country’s financial deficiencies. As Mohammed says:

The Hunger Games offers an uncomfortable mirror to our own world. In our daily lives, we often obsess about trivialities: we track celebrities, dedicate time to watching who wore what dress, aim to buy smartphones and cars while the vast majority of the world struggles to scrape a living out of the most dire circumstances. (n.pag.)

The statement above refers to our distressing trend of analyzing others’ lives (specially people under the spotlight) without thinking of them as human beings, and traces of this tendency can be found throughout the novel. As we meet one incident after the other consisting of people’s heartlessness and insensitivity, it becomes clearer and clearer to readers that Collins has, in fact, picked up realities and instances from the very world we

are obsessed with and absorbed in, to merely allow us to look back at ourselves in the series. It is very interesting to note the eerie similarities that Collins has drawn in the novel as a biting satire to the meaninglessness of the world, existing and gone. But nowhere is this replication and simulation as clear as when we look at the actual place where all the action is happening – the special arena (just like the athlete's ring, track or playground) created just for the hunger games.

### **The Arena: Playground of the Hunger Games**

In 'The Hunger Games', the arena is a complete battlefield in itself. This is a certain restricted area in the capital city called Capitol, where all 24 tributes are left for certain days to fend for themselves, defeating and killing off each other, until only one particular person remains in the arena to emerge as the winner. This arena is a very clever simulation of the outside world, which has violence and conflict going on everywhere, but the people in the Capitol are made to feel as if violence has been confined to a restricted and confined area which can never touch them. This false sense of security, this simulation of reality which is so frail that it can be broken anytime, is exactly what Baudrillard meant by the idea of simulation. This can be understood better if we go through Mary Pharr et al.'s words, "The arenas are originally presented as places of violence in order to make the Capitol citizens believe that they are safe, to conceal the fact the violence and oppression are everywhere." (176)

The lull in the audience, as they watch the hunger games from a safe place, does not last only while the games do. In fact, this false feeling, this replication and simulation is carried on much further and stretched to the extremes. As Pharr et. al. write:

The Hunger Games arenas have a vital function in Panem. After the Games, they are turned into historical theme parks where vacationing

Capitol residents can rewatch, tour, and even take part in reenactments. Like Disneyland, the arenas, as they were in the Games, serve now as ideological blankets covering a third-order simulation. To paraphrase Baudrillard, each new arena is there to conceal from the people of the Capitol the fact that it is the “real” Capitol, and all of “real” Panem, which is an arena. (176)

The arena, then, will be our subject of focus, as this deserves the attention and dissection in that it has been simulated so finely, carefully and cleverly from the world we live in. And even within the arena, this thesis will emphasize in discovering the ways in which the arena, already a simulation of the real world, has taken on the role of further simulation because it is under surveillance all the time, so as to broadcast the hunger games night and day. In creating a setting that is as small and claustrophobic as to fit into our television screens, in what ways has Suzanne Collins attempted to simulate the ways in which people are living in the digital world? Ldikó Limpár explains this concept of the arena as a space in simple but intriguing terms:

The arena in the Hunger Games novels clearly displays a festive quality. The arena is an empty (or even non-existing) space in physical terms until the Hunger Games it belongs to reaches its combat phase. Before the killing championship is displaced into this special space, the arena is only a space that will embrace its function – just like the outskirts of cities that regularly give place to fairs. (186)

From the extract above, we can understand that the arena is something that is quite different to what we know of spaces, sports and championships. It is a place artificially (and even forcefully) created as a simulated, unreal world that is so removed from reality

that it has become the reality in context. This can be further understood through Limpaf's comparison of the arena through Baudrillard's theory:

In his influential essay entitled "Simulacra and Simulation," Jean Baudrillard discusses the concept of Disneyland. Citing L. Martin's ideological interpretation that categorizes Disneyland as a "panegyric of American values, [an] idealizes transposition of a contradictory reality," Baudrillard argues that this "ideological" blanket functions as a cover for a simulation of the third order: Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that is Disneyland... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. (186-187)

This fascinating citation brings to us the idea that the Capitol is in fact, using the arena as a sort of a morbid "Disneyland", where the spectators feel that they are part of a spectacular show, and enjoy the objects on display – here the tributes. But actually, if agreeing with Baudrillard's theory, the arena is also a kind of "Disneyland" which seems to be made up but is as real as or even more real than the world outside it, the Capitol. The arena is cleverly disguised as a form of entertainment, but it is in fact the population outside the arena that is in the simulated world, either unwilling to notice or too ignorant to realize that they have long since stepped out of the semblance of a "real" world.

The next chapters will be focused on analyzing how the two major protagonists of the series – Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark – react to the simulation of the arena as well as the simulated world outside the arena, and the interesting and differing ways in

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which they react to them. Through their actions, this project will also attempt to understand the ways which humans are developing to cope with simulation in daily life.

### **Chapter III: The Virtual Girl: Katniss's Discovery of Power in Simulation**

Katniss Everdeen, the protagonist of the *Hunger Games* series, is a 15-year-old tribute from District 12. She is good at hunting and gathering food to provide for her beloved sister and mother, and manages to keep her family together by being resourceful and smart. As Miranda Green-Barteet explains, “Katniss is strong, thoughtful, and reserved. She is not, as critic Jessica Miller reminds us, “boy crazy” nor is she interested in marriage and motherhood. In many ways, her “behavior, attitude, temperament and character” represent the “norms of masculinity more than those of femininity” (qtd. in Miller 146). However, even though she is good at hiding from authority and flouting rules, Katniss is also incredibly straightforward and naïve. She is completely unaware of other people’s feelings towards her, mostly insensitive to others’ kindness, and is extremely inward-turning and self-absorbed.

But then, it is as if once Katniss is thrust into the simulated arena of the Hunger Games, she turns into a different personality, almost like a character from a reality show. She does certain things for the cameras, spouts specific statements for the audience, and behaves in a manner that is so unlike her as to seem like another person entirely. This is the effect that the simulated world and the outside gaze has on her. This chapter dissects the ways in which she reacts to the simulated world, and the ways in which she discovers her power and command over it, or in the manner that she ultimately succumbs to it.

Katniss might be new to the world of simulation and hyperreality, but she is no stranger to the world of duplicity and make-believe. Indeed, as soon as she realizes that there are going to be plenty of cameras watching her as soon as she has been made tribute, she takes control of her feelings in an astonishingly mature manner. She, in fact, behaves like one of present day human beings, who will produce a very different façade

for the sake of a simulated world. Her first experience in the world of cameras leaves her this way:

The station is swarming with reporters with their insectlike cameras trained directly on my face. But I've had a lot of practice at wiping my face clean of emotions and I do this now. I catch a glimpse of myself on the television screen on the wall that's airing my arrival live and feel gratified that I appear almost bored. (Collins 41)

The Katniss readers know, then, has been transferred into the Katniss that she wants readers to know. She refuses to let go of her power or surrender to the make-believe world she is entering. However, she takes instant notice of any form of surveillance around her, and usually seems to treat it with wariness or a kind of derision. An example is when she is leaving District 12 to take part in the Hunger Games: "We have to stand for a few minutes in the doorway of the train while the cameras gobble up our images, then we're allowed inside and the doors close mercifully behind us" (Collins 42). Her use of the word with a negative connotation – gobble up – immediately suggests to readers that she doesn't relish her encounter with the cameras. Also, she finds it 'merciful' that the doors close behind them once the cameras have had their fill, also signaling that she is glad to be out of their radar.

Also, as Peeta and Katniss enter the world of the games, it ceases to be a real, living, tangible world to them. Every action of theirs and even every thought seems to be measured, thought ahead and aligned to the strangeness they have been thrust into. One such instance arises on the first day they board a train to reach the Capitol. Haymitch, their mentor, who is also an alcoholic, ends up raging drunk and vomits on the floor before falling into the puddle himself. At that point, Peeta offers to take care of the mess

himself. Katniss is relieved, but her mind immediately begins to work overtime, as she ponders, “Possibly Peeta is trying to make a good impression on him, to be his favorite once the Games begin” (Collins 49). This guessing and counter-guessing, this habit of trying to get into someone’s mind and gauge the depth of their reactions, has been brought about as a reaction to the simulated world. Katniss is quick to jump to conclusions this way, although her conclusions are not even correct many times, as is proven again and again in the novel.

At first glance, there seems nothing to link this strange, fictional and new world of Panem to the current day world, as John Green says, “*The Hunger Games* begins long after the human population has been decimated by climate change and the wars that followed” (n.pag.). So when the setting for the *Hunger Games* first unravels, it seems very much like a young adult fiction set in a dystopian world. The story unfolds through the eyes of Katniss Everdeen, a gutsy 16-year-old who lies, hunts and scavenges to make ends meet for her family consisting of her mother and little sister. Her life changes the day she, along with fellow citizen Peeta Mellark, is chosen as a ‘tribute’ in the 74<sup>th</sup> ‘hunger games’ – an annual event when 24 contestants from the twelve districts surrounding the capital city of Capitol kill each other to survive as the victor.

As Katniss leaves to take part in the life-or-death competition, the setting is grotesque and morbid, and seems far removed from our reality – until the point when readers are informed that the hunger games will be telecast live through television all over Panem. From that moment on, almost everything done and said by the two protagonists, Peeta and Katniss, take a dual tinge. On the one hand, they are intelligent and strong characters who seem to do and say what they like but in reality, both of them make very calculated and strategic moves, acting all twenty-four hours a day.

As Green explains, “As the contest progresses, Katniss develops a relationship with the boy from her district. But not even she seems to know whether her feelings are real or faked for the omnipresent cameras” (n.pag.). This dilemma in Katniss’s mind forms the crux of the novels, and also helps us draw parallel lines between this world and ours.

Just as the participants of a reality show are understood to gradually blur the lines of reality and fiction, of the outer world and their own self, so too, Peeta and Katniss begin displaying skills of seasoned television actors, forced by the need to survive, by feeding the egos of the viewers that demand certain emotions and actions out of them. This is no easy act, as Jamie Lewis notices Katniss:

Ironically, despite its obvious dangers, in many ways she is more comfortable in the virtual forests of The Hunger Games that remind her of the forests she grew up in, than she is in front of the gaze of the TV cameras and during some of the lavish spectacles in the build-up to the main event. In the spotlight, Katniss feels out of place, and much of her training is tailored towards being seen to be more approachable, lucid and confident on camera. (n.pag.)

At this turn of events, with Katniss easing into the life of the hunger games, it is highly fascinating to note that everything the ill-equipped Katniss and the more poised Peeta perform is more or less for the sake of the viewers, to appease them, to appeal to them, to pretend to be likeable. Muller explains this phenomena succinctly, referring to Baudrillard:

The trilogy focuses in large part on the ease with which the real can be transformed into the virtual space through technical and aesthetic manipulation of viewers and participants. In his comments on simulation

and simulacra, Baudrillard suggests that the constant process of transformation confounds the distinction between the real and the virtual so that is 'becomes impossible (for one) to locate' oneself in time and space, to work out if one is outside or inside the simulacrum (29). In the hunger games of the first book, the viewing audience is invited to actively participate in the drama of the games they are watching, thereby minimising the distance between audience and participant and blurring the boundaries of the simulated and the actual. The audience can become sponsors, providing food, medicine or weaponry to help their favourite tribute win. In this they are recruited as associate directors of the simulation, players of and in the game, contributing to its theatricality and its sub-plots, aiding and abetting murder and violence. Katniss at one stage comments that, 'I'm glad for the cameras now. I want sponsors to see I can hunt, that I'm a good bet'. (199)

And this is exactly what many members of the current world we are living in are found to do. They present versions of themselves in the virtual world, particularly social media, which may be completely different than themselves in real life. By doing so, they are not only manipulating their own self, but also the perceptions of the viewers. In one way, they can be said to be controlling a small group of people that they influence.

This phenomena of the beings in the simulated world turning the tables on the ones who seem to be controlling them corresponds to what Lewis says about the vicious circle of control and surveillance in *Hunger Games*, "The tributes are not the only ones surveilled and controlled, so too are the citizen of the districts who watch The Games on the large telescreens" (n.pag.). The only difference is that while the citizens are only

manipulated psychologically, for Peeta and Katniss, this surveillance and adherence to it is a matter of life and death. This coincides disconcertingly with Hogan and Walther's observation that "The ability to present oneself in an assured and positive way has been associated with social, and even physical, survival" (qtd. in Chambers, 2013) (64). For the lead characters, it means that to survive physically, they must pretend that they are both deliriously in love. This is the only way that the viewers want to see them, and it is only by acting as foolhardy and romantic lovers that these two teenagers can be assured of gifts, tips and help that will tide them through the games. Mansour observes this tendency in the following manner:

Surviving in the arena not only requires survival and combat skills, but also expertise in appealing to the audience and acting before the cameras – not just to outsmart the gamemakers but to elicit the help of sponsors.

Furthermore, the importance of performance and symbolic presentation is a constant concern for survival for Katniss not just in the arena but during tours, ceremonies, and talk shows. Often, Katniss must act exteriorly in ways she does not agree with interiorly, or take actions not for the sake of their immediate effects but for the consequences they will induce by being televised. As such, Katniss's utterances and actions are always mediated, or simulated. (n.pag.)

It is extremely interesting to note and investigate the ways in which the two characters take great pains to maintain their supposed relation and convince the viewers. This once again reiterates the concept that there is a very thin line between simulation and reality, and also that one can very easily turn into the other, or that the simulated can make use of the real just as the real has been exploiting the simulated. When human beings use social

media, considered a simulation of real life, the makers of social media are in turn using up the subscribers' 'real' time, efforts, and emotions, which can also be considered as a disturbing reversal of expected roles.

In the matter of this simulation resembling the modern social media consumer, Katniss and Peeta have also caught on to the idea of trying to use the simulation to the best of their abilities, so as to make the best game out of it. They present what the viewers require – while they know that this is a simulation, the viewers are unaware that they are acting purely for their sake, and are in fact using the simulation as a tool. In fact, they behave exactly as Deborah Chambers says:

Nowadays online impressions are often highly managed by participants to enhance the self-image by carefully selecting favorable information for display. Inflating one's positive qualities and downplaying any flaws is a self-presentation practice that profile audiences have come to expect. (64)

As stated above, both Katniss and Peeta are careful to depict a unique and shared virtual identity, just as Hearn discovered in a study of Twitter that “social media is used to carefully construct a ‘meta-narrative and meta-image of self’” (qtd by Chamber) (62).

However, it is interesting to note that although both of them seem to project themselves as something they are not, or else as something more than they actually are, there are several instances where the mask falls off, and they remain as nothing more than real people out of their virtual persona. This is not only significant to mark, but also resembles the attitude and behavior of the modern person who cannot help but project themselves in a way to get the most ‘Likes’ and adulation on social media. This is particularly true about youths, who consider their technologically created selves to be extended and better personal selves. Hence the creation of a virtual world in *Hunger*

*Games* to catch the attention of young readers is understandable. This also fits in with Muller's observation that technology is appearing with greater regularity in YA fiction, and that:

This in itself is not surprising given the ways in which young people's sense of self is also intimately connected with their use of and dependence on technological devices and internet communications. Much YA dystopian fiction, including the *Hunger Games* texts, affirms and explores this linkage (Muller 2012). Bradford et al. suggest that due to advances in technology, there is an increase in the number of young adult texts that deal with the relationship between embodied/lived reality and the virtual world. (47)

In fact, Collins' attempt to bring together the real and the virtual has proven to be so disturbing for some critics that they view it as a danger to the society. This shows the great power even a virtual world created within a novel can have. This can be understood on the basis of the life-resembling simulated world created by Collins within the novel, which seems to pierce the readers and critics alike, who take a novel as a personal affront – here, the simulation (novel) has clearly percolated into the real (world).

However, as readers, it is understandable that Collins was not setting out to upset the real world as it exists, but merely creating a parallel (and imaginary) world of her own. Refuting the criticism that such simulation in words can be a danger to actual society, and reminding everyone that the world of *Hunger Games* is merely imaginative, Keith Ablow says:

The trouble is that, rather than opposing the media forces that jam such disparate messages together, *The Hunger Games* embraces that toxic

synergy. It is an entertainment product of complete fiction and great potency, given its intense level of fantasy and violence. As such, it only conveys young people closer to “expressing” in a virtual format their powerful and primitive instincts (potentially kindling their desire to truly express such instincts) while conveying them further from their daily realities and a little further still from their real selves. (n.pag.)

Along with this comparison between fiction and the virtual world, we come to the realization that this is the concept of simulation and simulacra described by Jean Baudrillard. Mansour puts a lot of thought into this idea, and argues that the character of Katniss is, in fact, waging war against the very concept of the simulacra. He mentions:

The hunger games, the ceremonies and talk shows, along with the fashion, architecture, infrastructure and cleanliness of the districts, and the presence and brutality of Capital soldiers, all form a system of simulacra that refer to the unchallenged strength of the Capital’s rule over Panem. Through these simulacra, all is mediated so that a simulation where the Capital cannot be defied is produced. Hence, after 75 years of obedience, the only action which returns hope and sparks rebellion is not a militia attack on the Capital or a kidnapping of a political official from the Capital, but Katniss’s defiance of the simulation produced by the Capital. She refuses to accept a simulated reality in which she must kill Peeta.

Katniss’s attack is an attack on the system of simulacra. (n.pag.)

With the realization that the novel is not only an accurate representation of simulacra but also a protest against it, the novel takes on a completely different angle, one where each object and each activity is something absolutely real and relating to our contemporary

times, and yet, where the same object is twice removed from our reality: once because the words can only copy the reality, and twice because even the world within the words is only a virtual copy of the real world. After the analysis, it is now the project's objective to analyze exactly how the world within the novel *Hunger Games* manages to portray itself as a contemporary world, and yet detach itself to be a standalone virtual entity, also rendering its characters and setting completely to be only simulations of themselves. Egan has pinpointed this moment of Katniss realizing the simulation and adjusting herself to it at the point when Katniss begins to nurse Peeta back to health. As she explains, strange things have begun to happen to Katniss, "Sometime she is acting. Sometimes she wonders if Peeta is acting, too. But sometimes they are caught up in something unmistakably honest and real" (Egan 48).

This misbalance between the real and the imaginary, the simulated and the actual, is what goes on throughout the novel, becoming more obvious to Katniss from this point. As Egan explains, "Her feelings aren't simple, and they're not entirely her own. Instead, they're wrapped up with her survival and – always – how they will appear to an audience" (48).

All that Katniss wants to care about is scoring in the simulated world. As they are first introduced to the Capitol in their entrance to the Hunger Games, she is thinking less about her dress catching fire, or her conduct, than how she appears to people. This need to adapt herself to the simulated world, and to the minds of the people who are so used to experiencing this simulation, is both interesting and scary. As she enters the arena with Peeta, she recounts:

At first, I'm frozen, but then I catch sight of us on a large television screen and am floored by how breathtaking we look. In the deepening twilight,

the firelight illuminates our faces. We seem to be leaving a trail of fire off the flowing capes. Cinna was right about the minimal makeup, we both look more attractive but utterly recognizable.

*Remember, heads high. Smiles. They're going to love you!* I hear Cinna's voice in my head. I lift my chin a bit higher, put on my most winning smile, and wave with my free hand. (Collins 70)

### **Love: Simulation Within Simulation**

When Katniss's actions and thoughts above are analyzed, it is clear that the first thought on her mind is not of herself, but of the way that her self *seems* to the outside world. This disconcerting attitude is strikingly similar to human beings in the present day and age. In fact, Collins seems to be using Katniss to bring to our attention the majority of reality TV show stars, whose mind is occupied with nothing but fifteen minutes of fame. And while in Katniss's case the overwhelming desire to please the public is part of her effort to win the games and thus her life, contemporary reality TV stars do not have any such thing at stake – this seems to be the disharmony that Collins is pointing at.

Katniss realizes the advantage that Peeta has given her with his confession of love for her. Whether it is real or fake, it means that she gets maximum attention as the intended unattainable princess. She muses: “But now Peeta has made me an object of love. Not just his. To hear him tell it I have many admirers. And if the audience really thinks we're in love . . . I remember how strongly they responded to his confession. Star-crossed lovers” (Collins 135). This title of the “star-crossed lovers” is what Katniss will need to maintain and improve upon till the hunger games last and they are both alive –

for how else could they hope to appear desirable before the eyes of the demanding public that has so many favorites to choose from? This title of the star crossed lovers sits heavily on Katniss's shoulders, because it is up to her to match Peeta's confessions, who has already shown all and sundry his devotion to the girl on fire.

But throughout the games – there is one question that haunts Katniss, confounds the readers, and confuses the viewers – is Katniss just playing along with Peeta's idea of being one half of the star crossed lovers, just to gain sympathy, donors, and eventually, victory? Or, along the way, does this pretense actually turn into the truth? Is Katniss herself or is she the simulated self that she has created to last throughout the games?

Citing Baudrillard, Muller explains this phenomenon very precisely:

Collins has commented that one of the motivations for writing *The Hunger Games* trilogy occurred when she was channel switching between reality television shows where young people were competing for money and footage of the Iraq war in which people were fighting for their lives (Collins [Blasingame] 726). This juxtaposition highlighted for her the seductive influence of reality television shows and video war games with their leverage of the virtual over the real, their power to not only mute the impact of media representations of adverse and horrifying experiences, but also to be established as equivalent 'entertainments'. The author's observations crucially identify the importance of the audience/player in co-participation in the uncanny space between the real and the virtual which complicates distinguishing one from the other in any clearly defined fashion. Baudrillard identifies this process as a 'crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth' (2) and he

names this as defining our contemporary media driven age; it is, he argues, the 'era of simulation' which 'lends itself to all systems of equivalents'(2). The blurring between the real and the virtual presses towards the liquefaction of referents, so that there is an ultimate loss of signposts for determining the truth. Baudrillard describes this as the 'precession of simulacra', a 'question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes' (2). The 1997 film Wag the Dog drew heavily on this paradigm for its narrative about a counterfeit war invented to distract public attention from the scandals of a (fictional) American President. In Collins's trilogy, the mediatised games are used by President Snow in a similar fashion; they are a distraction from the real game of economic inequality, and their configurations offer a viewing audience 'all the signs of the real' while camouflaging 'all their vicissitudes'. That this kind of masking exists in most developed countries which have access to powerful technologies, is clearly a major point made by the trilogy. (56)

The long citation above is necessary to make us understand two things: just how well Collins has modeled the world of the hunger games on our contemporary world described as the 'media-drive age', but also how the lines of reality and simulation eventually blur into a powerful environment for the characters of the novel, while also reminding readers that they might be facing a predicament similar to Katniss's. Although not as smoothly and as readily as Peeta, Katniss gradually learns how to make the screens, the

surveillance, and the simulated world work for her. Once she understands Peeta's duplicity and his search for her as a target along with the Career Tributes, she is ready to play her game, too. She does not let her face betray surprise, nor reflect anger. Instead, she cleverly reacts: "So as I slide out of the foliage and into the dawn light, I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me. Then I cock my head slightly to the side and give a knowing smile. There! Let them figure out what that means!" (Collins 163). This is one of the most beautiful examples of Katniss powerfully using the tactics of the fake world so as to fool the audience who think that they have trapped the players within the screens. In fact, Katniss is now using her new found understanding and strength to place the viewers within the simulated world that she herself has created out of the control over her emotions.

However, even while readers can discern that Katniss has gained some kind of power over the simulated world, the truth might actually be that the simulated world has turned her into something else – thus, her actions being not a reaction, but merely an adaptation and extension of the simulated world. Helen Day explores:

However, as Baudrillard explains, simulation can reveal more than you think. Try to organize a fake holdup, he urges, to test the repressive apparatus to a perfect simulation. You won't succeed, as "the web of artificial signs will be inextricably mixed up with real elements," and you will find yourself "immediately in the real" (Baudrillard, *Simulations* 39). Katniss's simulated feelings for Peeta do become real, perhaps as a result of the simulation, of getting to know "the boy with the bread" (HG 362). Love is always already a simulation, in that it is "inscribed in advance in

the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media” – the unlucky lovers beloved of television audiences (Baudrillard, *Simulations* 41). (174)

With this idea, Day makes us realize that the love, which we assumed arose out of a need in the simulated world, was actually a creation *of* the simulated world. We are now faced with the possibility that Katniss fell in love not *in spite* of the simulated world and her understanding of it, but in fact as a *result* of it. It would be worthwhile to test this theory and develop it further. But for our purposes, we can identify the barest minimum of truth – the Katniss is increasingly aware of the spectacle around her, devises ways to react to them, and even flips the simulated world’s rules in the faces of the Gamemakers so as to emerge victorious and with her pride intact. It is interesting to note and identify the growth of this character within the simulated world with innumerable challenges.

### Chapter III: Peeta Mellark: Reaction to the Simulated World

Peeta Mellark is the interesting and often surprise-inducing male protagonist of *Hunger Games*. Indeed, his very introduction in the novel is one where he proves himself to be much more than he actually seems to be. Peeta first enters the novel as a tribute — just as Katniss has volunteered for the reaping and will fight in the hunger games, Peeta's name is called out as a tribute, and he is the male competitor from District 12. Readers see him from Katniss's eyes, and she is not at all pleased at the instance of Peeta appearing as the male tribute alongside her. It is a strange mixture of ego, pride and unpaid debts that makes Katniss dislike Peeta's entrance to the games.

The first time readers are introduced to Peeta is when his name is singled out as a tribute for the seventy-fourth *Hunger Games*. He is introduced not through an omniscient narrator, but by Williams through the eyes of our heroine, Katniss:

No, the odds are not in my favor today. I watch him as he makes his way toward the stage. Medium height, stocky build, ashy blond hair that falls in waves over his forehead. The shock of the moment is registering on his face, you can see his struggle to remain emotionless, but his blue eyes show the alarm I've seen so often in prey. Yet he climbs steadily onto the stage and takes his place. (27-28)

Right from this point, the author seems to caution readers that Peeta is much more than what meets the eye. In the description above, we clearly note that he is frightened, much like a cornered prey. However, he manages to keep himself calm and steady, pointing to a reservoir of strength, patience or determination hidden within. This hidden quality, the revelation of the person inside the person, is repeated again and again throughout the novel. Bim Adewunmi describes Peeta in all conviction in a few words:

Peeta, called up alongside Katniss to compete in the games, is wonderful. First up, he's the son of a baker, so he has the keys to my heart, aka bread. (A sense of humour and good looks are always welcome, but you just can't beat a man with in-depth knowledge of baked goods.) At the height of the tournament, Peeta even uses his cake-decorating skills to camouflage himself from enemies. Above all, Peeta is kind. As a boy, he offers a starving Katniss some bread (and earns a beating for his troubles), and he is loyal, too – a large, shaggy dog made human. (n.pag.)

Along with this insightful characterization from Adewunmi, it is also interesting to note that contrary to most YA novels, Peeta here is only a secondary character when viewed in front of Katniss – meaning that in this series, a girl is the hero, and the male protagonist barely holds up a candle to her. Sarah Saltzer says, “Peeta is a baker, a nurturer, a feeder. Katniss is a hunter... Peeta's centrality to the story—and eventually, his precedence over the more traditionally masculine Gale—is a crucial part of the way *The Hunger Games*' larger existence flips traditional gender roles” (n.pag.)

It is, thus, even more fascinating to unravel the character of Peeta, the way he is placed throughout the execution of the Hunger Games, his understanding of the simulated world that he finds himself in, as well as his reaction to the world that is merely a replica of the original.

### **Understanding of the Simulated World**

Peeta's reaction to the simulated world can be described as one of an aware, intelligent and controlled individual in the real world. As soon as Peeta realizes that he

and his counterparts have stepped into a simulation of the world, he applies a cunning and strategy that takes him quite far in the game. Although other tributes, especially the Careers, have an acute sense of being thrust into a simulated world, Peeta might be one of the few who knows how to work it to the best of his advantage. He is intelligently aware of both the cameras and the constant scrutiny that he will be facing throughout, and early on, seems to devise a strategy that is actually very near to the truth of his life. However, what is worth discussing here is the ways in which he copes with the simulated world, and the strategies that work for him and those that backfire, in his attempt to fit into this simulation.

From the narrator Katniss's account, Peeta seems to be a mild, quiet, usually kind character. But she has already mentioned the shift that seem to come into him once he was thrust into an unknown world. As stated above, Peeta is the male tribute from District 12, meaning that he has to fight for his life alongside Katniss, even killing her if possible, so as to emerge as the victor and the overall winner. But from the very beginning, he seems to be a poor contender for the title. While Peeta initially appears calm and in control of himself when he is chosen as a tribute, soon he seems to lose his nerves. Before they are to leave their districts to reach the arena of the Hunger Games, Katniss notes:

Peeta Mellark, on the other hand, has obviously been crying and interestingly enough does not seem to be trying to cover it up. I immediately wonder if this will be his strategy in the Games. To appear weak and frightened, to reassure the other tributes that he is no competition at all, and then come out fighting. (Collins 41)

Apart from this change noticed by Katniss, There is still one more change as Peeta and Katniss interact with their mentor, Haymitch. This person from District 12, who won the Hunger Games long ago, is supposed to guide the two current tributes. However, all he seems to be doing is getting intoxicated and forgetting about his two wards. Exasperated by this, Peeta reacts in a manner that seems to be unlike him. "I'm surprised to see the hardness in his eyes. He generally seems so mild" says Katniss (Collins 56). This then, can be identified as one of the first changes that Peeta's introduction to an unknown world, the fear of the unnatural world ahead, has brought to him. Following this, Katniss is also roused to anger, and both of them threaten Haymitch to give them their best shot.

After the incident, Katniss is left contemplating this change that is clearly seen in Peeta's attitude. She notices that as they enter the Capitol, which both of them instinctively dislike because it has taken them away from family and friends, Peeta is actually waving to the crowd, and smiling. She thinks back carefully on his actions, on the way that he seems to be but is not. She puts her feelings in this way:

I have misjudged him. I think of his actions since the reaping began. The friendly squeeze of my hand. His father showing up with the cookies and promising to feed Prim . . . did Peeta put him up to that? His tears at the station. Volunteering to wash Haymitch but then challenging him this morning when apparently the nice-guy approach had failed. And now the waving at the window, already trying to win the crowd. All of the pieces are still fitting together, but I sense he has a plan forming. He hasn't accepted his death. He is already fighting hard to stay alive. Which also means that kind Peeta Mellark, the boy who gave me the bread, is fighting hard to kill me. (Collins 60)

This suspicion and doubts, the double-checking and backtracking, and the distrust that is brewing between the two protagonists, particularly on Katniss's part, has a lot to do with starting to live in a simulated world, and losing the ability to differentiate the thin line between reality and its copy. Even emotions, intentions and relationships can be turned inside out and upside down in a second in this simulated world.

Soon after this, Peeta and Katniss, along with the other tributes, enter a truly panoptical world – where someone is gazing at them all the time and keeping them under complete surveillance. The way that Peeta and Katniss react to this gaze is quite fascinating. While Katniss's reactions has been described in the previous chapter, in this chapter we will be focusing on Peeta, the tribute who claims time and again to have no special abilities, and also seems to be quite honest and straightforward, but whose personality seems to transform dramatically in the simulated world.

What we need to understand, as has been already clarified, is that Peeta is in a double simulated world — one is the arena, which is a reproduction of the strife-filled outside world, and another is as an actor in the television sets of the people throughout Panem. On the one hand, Peeta has to fight the other tributes in the arena, and on the other, he also has to appeal to the viewers, who might hold his future in their hands and wealth. How does he react to the overwhelming pressure of living a doubly simulated life? That is what we aim to figure out in the research below.

Peeta's emotions and actions are analyzed through Katniss, who is the novel's narrator. As she has already mentioned, she finds Peeta's motives dubious, and his actions even more suspect. However, she still considers him a sort of an ally, just because both of them belong to the same district, and he is a comforting presence in the midst of an uncertain world. While Katniss scrutinizes Peeta's motives in the morning, by evening,

she has begun to think in a different manner: “Despite this morning’s revelation about Peeta’s character, I’m actually relieved when he shows up, dressed in an identical costume” (Collins 67). Katniss’s attitude towards Peeta thus establishes him as someone she needs for comfort, but is herself not too comfortable about. Peeta’s emotions are a bit more difficult to discern, because he is being described by Katniss most of the times, and has no agency of his own.

This difficulty in knowing Peeta is compounded by the fact that Katniss’s reactions to him seem to vary from moment to moment. One minute she is friendly towards him, the other minute she pretends to be friendly to him, and the third moment, she is outright hostile to him. This can be analyzed, again, as the effect of the simulated world on Katniss, which doesn’t let herself be herself, and makes her create a simulated self, too, so as to fit in with the world.

Meanwhile, through hidden connotations, readers strongly sense that Peeta is in love with Katniss, has always liked her, and at times it seems as if he can even forsake his life to help her win the games. However, everything is so fluid, unexpected and topsy-turvy in the simulated world, that the lines between attraction and repulsion, help and harm, suggestion and warning often blur and fade into nothingness.

The extent to which Peeta begins catering to the simulated world can be noted in the behavior he demonstrates throughout the rest of the fight in the hunger games. At the beginning, it seems as if Peeta is on Katniss’s side. He covers up her follies, speaks up for in front of others, smiles at her, agrees to have training together and is generally quite amiable and friendly. But although he keeps up a front when he is with others, the moment the two of them are together, he seems to transform into another person. He

demands explanations and seeks answers from Katniss, who divulges some secrets to him because he is her only friend in the strange place.

But soon enough, Katniss senses this dual personality of his, and it leaves her with doubts. She is further enraged when their coach, Haymitch, insists that they always appear together in public. She thinks: “It’s such a joke! Peeta and I going along pretending to be friends! Talking up each other’s strengths, insisting the other take credit for their abilities. Because, in fact, at some point, we’re going to have to knock it off and accept we’re bitter adversaries” (Collins 92)

This feeling of being torn seems to nag at Peeta, too: he has to keep up another face for the simulated world, while he is someone else entirely when he is by himself. Although they have been instructed to stick together as a team before the games commence, it is obvious that Peeta finds it hard, too, and is mostly putting up an act for the sake of the audience rather than behaving as himself. As Katniss explains, it is difficult for the duo to keep up their pretense. They have to remind each other to get into their simulated selves, and to react properly to the simulated life set up for them. For example, in the midst of a forced conversation, Peeta says to Katniss, “Okay, now laugh as if I’ve said something funny.” After they give a “somewhat convincing laugh”, Peeta says, “All right, I’ll keep smiling pleasantly and you talk” (Collins 98). While Katniss accepts that this is actually “wearing them out”, the fascinating part is that neither of the characters know exactly how much of the other person’s behavior is an act put up for the sake of the audience, and how much of it is real. After a while, they even stop feeling it themselves – they can’t differentiate their own feelings as real or pretended.

A little later, as they are joking around, Katniss suddenly realizes that she cannot distinguish between what is real and what is not. She muses:

It's messing with my mind too much, trying to keep straight when we're supposedly friends and when we're not. At least when we get into the arena, I'll know where we stand. "Don't. Don't let's pretend when there's no one around."

"All right, Katniss," he says tiredly. After that, we only talk in front of people. (Collins 100)

This exchange between Katniss and Peeta is eerily reminiscent of the fake selves put up by people in the modern world. They begin putting up an alter ego to deal with the strange world they are thrust into and expected to adapt in, and eventually end up in a position where no one, least of all the actors themselves know whether this is really their actual or simulated self.

This dilemma remains with Peeta and reflects in his behavior towards Katniss when they enter the arena of the Hunger Games. Any time there is even a subtle chance of the involvement of the 'audience', 'surveillance', 'gaze', and the 'simulated work', there is a difference in his attitude that makes the readers as well as Katniss question his motives and the stand he is actually taking towards the games and towards Katniss.

In the course of the games, Peeta requests that he be trained separately from Katniss, although they were trained together earlier. In response, Katniss has some deep feelings welling up. The two paragraphs below actually form the crux of the novel, as well as the contradictory feelings of people living in a simulation, the constant yo-yoing of their minds. This reveals to us just how our lives are, too, because this dilemma is what we often undergo when we are trying to survive in this world of ours:

Betrayal. That's the first thing I feel, which is ludicrous. For there to be betrayal, there would have had to been trust first. Between Peeta and me.

And trust has not been part of the agreement. We're tributes. But the boy who risked a beating to give me bread, the one who steadied me in the chariot, who covered for me with the redheaded Avox girl, who insisted Haymitch know my hunting skills . . . was there some part of me that couldn't help trusting him?

On the other hand, I'm relieved that we can stop the pretense of being friends. Obviously, whatever thin connection we'd foolishly formed has been severed. And high time, too. The Games begin in two days, and trust will only be a weakness. Whatever triggered Peeta's decision — and I suspect it had to do with my outperforming him in training — I should be nothing but grateful for it. Maybe he's finally accepted the fact that the sooner we openly acknowledge that we are enemies, the better. (Collins 114)

This chilling juxtaposition between friend and foe, truth and lie, reality and simulation, trust and betrayal is what keeps recurring throughout the novel, and also is a reflection of just how the simulated world preys on the hearts, minds and nerves of the young duo, who cannot escape out of it unscathed. The ways in which both of them react to it, adapt to it or imbibe it is what makes us realize just how well they have understood the simulated world.

An example of this can be noticed during the interview that all tributes have to undergo before the entrance into the hunger games. At the interview, Katniss is constantly reminded to 'be herself, to charm the audience, to make them fall in love with her.' This proves difficult for her, particularly in front of the cameras. When she enquires about Peeta's strategy for the interview, which is their first major appearance before the public

and thus a grand entrance into a simulated world, Haymitch tells her that he is going to be “likable” (Collins 117). But once the interview begins, Peeta is far more than merely likable – he actually shocks and hypnotizes the audience (and Katniss) by confessing that he is in love with Katniss. Katniss, the girl whom he will need to fight and ruthlessly kill in the arena if he is to save himself. His confession is so sudden and so unexpected that everyone is taken aback, and this love story generates plenty of interest and sets him apart from the other contestants. Katniss is surprised beyond measure by this confession, and has to force herself to react correctly for the sake of the cameras that are trained on her, judging her, delving into her identity, transporting her to a simulated world. She says:

For a moment, the cameras hold on Peeta’s downcast eyes as what he says sinks in. Then I can see my face, mouth half open in a mix of surprise and protest, magnified on every screen as I realize, Me! He means me! I press my lips together and stare at the floor, hoping this will conceal the emotions starting to boil up inside of me. (Collins 132)

At first glance, readers might feel that while Katniss is covering up her emotions best she can just for the sake of the cameras, the 24/7 surveillance that forces her to be a different person, Peeta does not lose his composure or his truthfulness even at such a crucial juncture. However, Katniss doubts this entire confession by Peeta, and in fact, even the existence of his own, actual self as the baker boy. According to her, “Peeta has absolutely wiped the rest of us off the map with his declaration of love for me” meaning essentially that she sees it as nothing but a ploy to generate the audience’s interest, mark himself as their favorite, and garner all the votes and sympathy in the eventual tournament (Collins 133).

In fact, immediately after the interview ends and they reach a somewhat private space, Katniss attacks Peeta physically, letting go of all her pent up rage. Although Katniss is made to realize how Peeta has helped her rankings in the simulated world, and she apologizes to him, she can't seem to shake off the feeling that this is going on in another realm, through ways and tactics that are unreal and illusory. "Peeta actually is charming and then utterly winning as the boy in love" Katniss muses, pointing to what might be Peeta's penchant for telling the truth even in the most troubled and simulated world, or what might simply be an expert strategy to cope with the simulated world and get his best out of it (Collins 137).

This theme of Peeta's strategy of adjustment to the simulated world of the games is recurrent in the conversation Peeta and Katniss have just before they head off to the games. During this exchange, Peeta mentions that "wants to die as himself" (Collins 140). This is one of the strongest statements in the novel to indicate that Peeta is actually resisting their forced assimilation into the simulated world, that he needs to remain as "himself" and indeed die as "himself" and not as someone else created by the whim of the Capitol. But Katniss is yet to understand this powerful assertion. She wonders, "How could he die as anyone but himself?" To this, Peeta answers: "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not" (Collins 140) This statement can be taken as the most poignant proof of our hypothesis: that in fact, the arena is only a simulation of another world, turning human beings into simulated objects. Peeta has already understood this characteristic of the Capitol, and especially of the arena of the hunger games and the combined anguish of imminent death and all-seeing cameras: he is in no doubt that this simulated world will also try to make him one of its own. Peeta understands the power and omnipotence of the simulated world, and yet he

does not flinch, for he vows to resist against this simulation best as he can. However, though this statement reads like a firebrand resistance, Peeta's approach to the simulated world is actually quite subtle, and even his resistance stems out of an acceptance of the reality (or the hyperreality), and hence is very sensitive and well thought-out.

After this conversation, the tributes plunge straight into the arena. They are warned by Haymitch to steer clear of the cornucopia that holds valuable items but could also invite them to their death. However, Katniss is determined to get ahold of bows and arrows that are placed just out of her reach in the golden cornucopia. As she is mustering up courage for this, she suddenly notices Peeta and recounts: "I can tell he's looking at me and I think he might be shaking his head" (Collins 149). In this confusion of Peeta trying to caution her, Katniss misses her chance to run for the cornucopia, and thus loses out on the bows and arrows, which could be the key to her survival. Even this scene makes us wonder just what Peeta wants: is he actually warning Katniss to follow Haymitch's command because he's looking out for her, or is it actually his ploy to keep Katniss away from the bow and arrows she uses so skillfully and could actually use to shoot her way to victory? Is he friend or enemy? Is he acting as a normal person in the real world, or has he already become a part of the simulated arena?

These are the questions that also seem to plague Katniss, who is left in a turmoil about Peeta's behavior. Her fluctuating feelings towards Peeta – sometimes warm, other times indifferent – resonate in this sentence: "I'm relieved Peeta's alive. I tell myself again that if I get killed, his winning will benefit my mother and Prim the most. This is what I tell myself to explain the conflicting emotions that arise when I think of Peeta" (Collins 156). Just like Katniss cannot make up her mind at Peeta, sometimes physically assaulting him and at other times longing for him to alive, so are the readers left to

wonder, what exactly is Peeta? Is he his own self, is he a simulation that can no longer be reached?

The next time we come upon Peeta, he is actually in league with the other tributes, in a big winning group which intends to eliminate the weaker opponents. Peeta, who had confessed again and again that he had no special skills, had no chance of winning, and was out from the beginning, has actually gained entry into a privileged coterie that go about ruthlessly destroying the other tributes in a gang. When Katniss realizes that Peeta has morphed into one of the career tributes, she nearly “falls out of a tree” in surprise, where she has been hiding (Collins 159). This moment, when Katniss finally catches sight of Peeta in the actual games, is when she has a whiff of his real intentions towards her. She realizes that Peeta was not trying to protect her from jumping into the cornucopia, but in fact plotting to get the precious supplies himself. Her voice takes a deadly tone towards Peeta: “Obviously, the noble boy on the rooftop was playing just one more game with me. But this will be his last. I will eagerly watch the night skies for signs of his death, if I don’t kill him first myself” (Collins 161). This also, is another evidence of just how far the simulated world can affect human beings like Peeta and Katniss: leading one to the lair of the powerful and the victorious, and making another so bitter and vengeful, utterly unlike herself.

Meanwhile, in Katniss’s mind, Peeta continues to be the villain who has turned against her. In fact, he has also managed to demolish the carefully preserved image of them both being the “star-crossed lovers” who had gathered so much attention and affection from the viewers, who considered the lies put out by Katniss and Peeta to be their whole truth. Soon after this, though, Katniss and Peeta meet each other head-on, during which Peeta again seems to act very strangely, telling Katniss to run away instead

of killing her or exposing her to his companions. Katniss mentions: “I’m able to form only one thought: Peeta Mellark just saved my life” (Collins 193).

By this time, readers are already deep into the simulated world, just like the two major characters. However, the way Peeta reacts to this world continues to confuse and confound till the very end of the games. Meanwhile, things take a dramatic turn in the games, where it is declared that for the first time in history, two tributes from the same district can be winners together if they make it alive to the end. What this means is that Peeta and Katniss, whatever their feelings towards each other, have no reason to continue fighting or trying to kill each other. Because both of them will live if they work with each other to destroy their opponents. As soon as this dramatic change in the rules is announced, Katniss has a change of heart:

Peeta, who’s been wounded, is now my ally. Whatever doubts I’ve had about him dissipate because if either of us took the other’s life now we’d be pariahs when we returned to District 12. In fact, I know if I was watching I’d loathe any tribute who didn’t immediately ally with their district partner. Besides, it just makes sense to protect each other. And in my case — being one of the star-crossed lovers from District 12 — it’s an absolute requirement if I want any more help from sympathetic sponsors.

(Collins 243)

Although it is now imperative that Katniss and Peeta team up and try to kill others in their path to victory, Katniss is still not assured about Peeta’s intentions. In fact, now that the rules have been changed for the first time in seventy-four years to allow two winners in the hunger games, Katniss’s thoughts take a different turn – one that is shrouded in suspicion and disbelief, and that casts a doubt in all of Peeta’s actions till date. At the end

of her analysis, she comes to the conclusion that she must play along with Peeta in this simulated world, squashing all her other feelings, because the only things that matter are keeping up a face in the simulated world and behaving exactly as the world expects her to behave. She muses about Peeta:

The star-crossed lovers . . . Peeta must have been playing that angle all along. Why else would the Gamemakers have made this unprecedented change in the rules? For two tributes to have a shot at winning, our “romance” must be so popular with the audience that condemning it would jeopardize the success of the Games. No thanks to me. All I’ve done is managed not to kill Peeta. But whatever he’s done in the arena, he must have the audience convinced it was to keep me alive. Shaking his head to keep me from running to the Cornucopia. Fighting Cato to let me escape. Even hooking up with the Careers must have been a move to protect me. Peeta, it turns out, has never been a danger to me. (Collins 243-44)

Even at this point when she is thinking about their fabricated relationship, Katniss is accustomed to thinking that all that she does, and Peeta does, is not for themselves, but merely a charade in the simulated world — putting up an act for the audience that is so eagerly watching them, and willing them to play the role of the obsessively in-love couple.

It is more complicated to understand, meanwhile, what Peeta’s mentality is like — because as mentioned above, the way we see him is through Katniss’s eyes. However, it doesn’t take readers much time to understand that Peeta not only understands the simulated world he is in, but learns to use it to his advantage, creating a self that is both him and not-him. He is as aware of the cameras and of the simulated world as anyone

else, but he is also more truthful and honest in front of the cameras, more than anyone can be in the tricky situation he is in. The reason he is unfailingly strong, and resilient, and looking out for Katniss is that he is really fond of her, and willing to sacrifice his own life for the girl he has loved all his life. While at times it might seem as if he is just as Katniss and is doing things for the viewer's benefit, Peeta is in fact doing only what his heart tells him to. And in this sense he is one of those rare individuals who can actually challenge the simulated world and remain his own self against all odds.

## Chapter IV: Simulation: Its Traces in Panem

In the earlier chapters, it has been established that Peeta Mellark and Katniss Everdeen, the two protagonists of the dystopian series *Hunger Games*, are basically living a simulated life, and have modified themselves to better suit the purposes of the simulation. In this chapter, we tackle another crucial issue: is the entire city of Capitol, the capital of Panem, another attempt by Suzanne Collins to depict a highly simulated location? This will include a dissection of the fabled city of Capitol, as well as its inhabitants, who seem to be in a perpetual state of simulation, unlike the Hunger Games tributes, who only step into the simulated world once in their lifetime. The first glimpse we have of the capitol is through Katniss's eyes as they chug into Capitol on a train on their way to the arena in the hunger games. This is what Katniss recalls:

Both Peeta and I run to the window to see what we've only seen on television, the Capitol, the ruling city of Panem. The cameras haven't lied about its grandeur. If anything, they have not quite captured the magnificence of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal. All the colors seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes, like the flat round disks of hard candy we can never afford to buy at the tiny sweet shop in District 12.

(Collins 59)

This description is enough to alert us to the "artificial" and "bizarre" world that is the Capitol – far removed from the drudgeries and challenges being faced by the residents of the rest of the country, especially in poorer districts, which basically covers all districts

from 4 down. This scenario is strongly reminiscent of the present day world, where the vast majority of wealth is controlled by an astonishingly small percentage. This is evidenced by Moshinsky's reference to a study carried out by Credit Suisse, "The distribution of global wealth has stayed just as skewed as last year, according to a huge study by Credit Suisse. The bank compiled data showing that just 0.7% of the world's adult population owns almost half of the world's wealth, while the bottom 73% have less than \$10,000 each" (n.pag.).

This cannot be a mere coincidence, and it serves as a reminder to just how unequal the distribution of wealth (and this, power and privilege) is in our real world. While we might normally disregard this as a way of life in the world around this, this inequality is likely to shock us into deep thought when it is visualized in the fictional world of Panem. However, realistically reflecting the present even in a simulated world is not Collins's only ability. She is equally mindful of the past.

We might understand this from Henthorne's observation of the writer, "As she indicates in interviews, however, the *Hunger Games* trilogy is as much a response to the present as it is to the past, Collins having conceived of the books after watching a combination of war footage and reality television (qtd. in Blasingame 726-7) (121)"

This comparison between *Hunger Games* and the present day reality shows is further justified by Henthorne's moving and apt social critique of the novel. For Henthorne,

Indeed, one could even argue that citizens in the Capitol derive both pleasure and affirmation from the suffering of others. As in Franz Kafka's story, "A Hunger Artist," privation becomes a spectacle for those unused to want, Kafka's character capturing "the attention of the entire city." The

Hunger Games captures the Capitol's attention in the same sort of way, reminding citizens that they are indeed privileged. More than that, though, the Games reinforce citizens of the Capitol's sense of their own superiority over those living in the districts by dehumanizing tributes in the arena. In this the Hunger Games resemble contemporary reality television. (119)

Hawthorne explains that Panem, and especially the Capitol, is a mere continuation of our contemporary life in the most distorted manner possible – as participants and viewers of reality television. As Egan says, “Panem is a place of nightmares, but it's also a place we can understand, with its intractable injustices and its fine line between reality and “reality” as created for a broadcast. It's like the world as we know it – gone terribly wrong” (32).

To understand this reality, we first need to be clear about what exactly the arena encompasses, and how closely it is modeled on the ruthless Capitol within which it is held (and vice versa). Limpár mentions this beautifully in these words, “The annual fighting space of the Games thus represents the Dystopian world that brought it into existence on many levels. It is a space of massacre outside the juridical Panem, it is part of the political Panem, and it represents Panem as a geographical and political entity as well as a spectacle” (n. pag.). This is the clever way in which Collins confuses the reader and fools the inhabitants of Panem. While the reader thinks that the arena is a distorted world and that Panem is real, it could, in fact, have quite a different meaning – that the arena is an outcome of the ruthless, fake, and often automated world that is Panem.

Another factor that we need to take into account is the transient nature of the simulated world. While readers might feel themselves transported into the simulated world along with Katniss and Peeta, it is interesting to note that there are frequent

referrals to reality even within the densely simulated Panem. Day presents interesting ideas on the existence of the simulated, the real and the hyperreal in this instance:

Simulation, in this series, is always a temporary state: the real can be hijacked, but it always returns. Just as Peeta's mind is hijacked by aversion therapy and tracker-jacker venom to hate Katniss, so he eventually recognizes the shiny quality of simulation... Real and not real are two distinct options, and the hyperreal only a stage in discovering a real, safer future. (174)

This hypothesis, that the simulation is fleeting and can be removed after the characters have understood its hold on them, is a thought-provoking one and one that is open to debate. However, worth noting here is the extreme intensity of the simulation in the arena within Panem itself, which is reiterated time and again in the novels, and which no reader can eventually miss. "To paraphrase Baudrillard, each new arena is there to conceal from the people of the Capitol the fact that it is the "real" capitol, and all of "real" Panem, which *is* an arena" (qtd. in Baudrillard, *Simulations* 25)" When Day says this, she is again reminding us of the gruesome reality that the arena is only a version of the Panem that exists in order to make people forget, at least for the duration of the games, that they actually live in a simulated world, day in and day out.

## Chapter V: Blurred Lines: Simulation Twice Over

The research has tried to delved into the setting created for the *Hunger Games* series, specially focusing on the first part of the trilogy, published in 2008. The story is set in a country called Panem, which to innocent readers seems like a fictional world. But as we find the meanings and symbols hidden within this country, it eerily resembles the world that we live in now. There are so many tell-tale signs that point at the flawed world system as it exists today: a rich few controlling the resources of the huge majority, meaningless violence and bloodshed throughout the world, and this new-found tendency to lead out lives based on the extremely narrow contexts of surveillance and screens, panopticons and simulations.

As we dig deeper into the setting, it is evident that this bizarre world is actually all that is happening around us, and is cruelly mimicking our need for the fantastic and extraordinary. The hunger games in particular, which happen to appease the power drives of the wealthy population of the Capitol, are an accurate portrayal of what the modern person wants – to stay safe in the comforts of their homes and hearts while deciding the fates and lives of the people inside the simulated world (or, in our case, the contestants of reality television shows). What Collins is trying to convey to us is that this safe space does not exist anywhere – we are in fact as much playthings to our emotions as the people inside the screens are to the whims of the game show controllers. This truth that emerges at the end of the research permeates far and wide from the pages they are confined to, and reach out to each and every research, reader and thinker, who can immediately connect the dots and stare at the horrifying picture of the world that has been painted so artistically and yet so succinctly by Collins.

It was interesting to note that many critics agreed that the simulated world of the hunger games was merely the tip of the iceberg. While to naïve onlookers and readers it might seem as if the world was closely modeled on the world we are currently living in, or the kinds of war-studded battlefields we have overcome in the past, the fact is that Collins has cleverly managed to revert the reality in many cases. While we are reveling in the extraordinary simulation of our world in Panem, she is in fact making us aware that it is us readers who are actually living in this simulated world, not unlike the viewers of the hunger games, who are actually living in the simulated world themselves while imagining that they are watching the simulated world on their television screens and surveillance cameras.

While researching on the theme of simulation, we also came upon the concept that the novel was a sharp critique of the simulated worlds created for reality shows in televisions and video games, because what we imagine as simulation and what we like to lose ourselves in, is actually a trap. Just as Baudrillard mentioned that the world outside Disneyland is actually as simulated as Disneyland, all of these simulated worlds inside screens are only present to make us forget that we, human beings, are actually living within huge simulated worlds ourselves. The difference might be that while characters such as Peeta and Katniss are actually aware of the limitations and contradictions of the simulated world, we are unaware of this, and continue to fool ourselves with a sense of security that we are living in the modern and the real, the here and the present. Through the research into the world of Panem and the arena, as well as the actions of our protagonists, we can conclude that the study has actually served as a warning bell to the whole of the satiated human populace, and should be interpreted as one.

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